



Fiji

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country consists of more than 300 islands, 100 of which were inhabited; most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. The country has an area of approximately 6,800 square miles, and its population is an estimated 840,000. Fifty-two percent of the population was Christian, 32 percent Hindu, and 6 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination was the Methodist Church, which claimed approximately 218,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also had significant followings. The Methodist Church was supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remained influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There also were a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religion runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous persons, who constituted approximately 54 percent of the population, were Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who constituted an estimated 40 percent of the population, practiced Hinduism, while approximately 20 percent of this community practiced Sunni Islam. In addition, a significant minority of Indo-Fijians were Christian. Other ethnic communities included Chinese and Europeans. Approximately 60 percent of the Chinese community practiced Christianity and 40 percent practiced Confucianism or some form of ancestor worship. The European community was predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintained a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations were nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, notably the Methodist Church, had missionaries in the country. The missionaries operated numerous religious schools, including colleges, not subsidized by the Government.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. There is no state religion, although elements of the Methodist Church have advocated the establishment of a Christian state. Religious groups are not required to register. The Government does not restrict foreign clergy, domestic or foreign missionary activity, or other activities of religious organizations.

Major observances of all three predominant religions are celebrated as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. The Government partly sponsors an annual ecumenical prayer festival.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the role of religion continues to be a political issue. Some Methodist Church authorities and allied political groups continued to advocate the establishment of a Christian state, but the new leadership of the Methodist Church somewhat moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous leadership.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In 2004, incidents of sacrilege increased. Of the 48 incidents reported, most consisted of unidentified persons robbing and desecrating Hindu temples. At least one Member of Parliament specifically cited the incidents as examples of a lack of respect for the Hindu religion, and Christian leaders were encouraged to preach about respecting other religions.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy has disseminated materials related to political and religious freedom across a wide spectrum of society. The Embassy continued to make religious freedom an important part of its effort to promote democracy and human rights.

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